

Regional Coordination

Northwest governments and stakeholders are working to develop and analyze alternative management plans for fish and wildlife resources of the Columbia River Basin. This regional effort is being coordinated through the Multi-Species Framework project; the newly created Columbia River Basin Forum may also play a coordination role. Participants in the Framework process include state governments, tribal governments and federal agencies, with a management committee representing all three entities. Regional stakeholders also are participating in the project. Participants hope this effort will help identify areas of consensus, and ultimately lead to broader regional agreement on the future management direction for the Columbia Basin. This paper describes the government-related entities participating in the project and the related processes.

The region is focused on management plans now because of the statutory obligation of the Federal agencies to update the 1995 Biological Opinion and the Council's obligation under the Northwest Power Act to amend its Fish and Wildlife Program. The scope of the federal study is intended to cover ESA listed salmon, steelhead, westslope cutthroat, bulltrout, snails, and sturgeon -- a subset of the broader Columbia basin fish and wildlife concerns of the Framework process and the Council's program.

The Multi-Species Framework

The Northwest Power Planning Council initiated the Framework Project in response to two scientific reviews. Both reviews suggested the region's fish and wildlife program would benefit from a science-based framework that would help guide policy choices.

The scientific groups also said the Council should develop a science-based vision for Columbia Basin fish and wildlife management that recognizes the interrelated parts of the Basin's ecosystem. As a result, the Framework is developing a set of alternatives for future management of the Basin and will analyze the biological, social and economic effects of the alternatives.

The Framework will prepare a report by the fall of 1999, documenting and evaluating the alternatives. States, tribes, federal agencies, Council staff and stakeholders participated in the development of the alternatives and are participating in the development of the analyses. Input was also solicited throughout the region through public involvement and outreach activities.

The state governments, tribal governments, federal agencies and the Council expect the Framework to guide the development of, among other things, alternative hydropower system actions and alternative tributary habitat and hatchery approaches, by providing information on the likely biological, social and economic outcomes of those alternatives. The federal agencies plan to apply the alternatives developed through the Framework process in their "4 H Paper," described below.

The Columbia River Basin Forum

Formerly known as the Three Sovereigns, the Columbia River Basin Forum is made up of representatives from the four Northwest states, 11 of the 13 Columbia Basin Tribes, and the federal agencies involved in the Columbia River. Its purpose is to provide a forum to collaborate on and coordinate basin level policy, planning and implementation issues and processes that effect the Columbia River Basin's fish and wildlife and related habitat.

The Forum provides a place for regional governments, interested parties and the general public to utilize information and analysis developed through the Framework, by the federal caucus and through the development of the Northwest Power Planning Council's Fish and Wildlife Program to discuss alternative management approaches to the Basin and test regional agreement on the various alternatives.

The federal agencies, for example, expect to discuss their Biological Assessment on hydropower operations and a package of actions in the other sectors (harvest, habitat, and hatcheries) within the Forum. The states, tribes and the Council have the opportunity to do the same, bringing any particular management or recovery plans forward for discussion. Other regional interests will also be invited to participate in the Forum discussions.

The overall goal of the Forum is to develop a regionally agreed upon recommendation for fish and wildlife recovery that addresses all factors affecting fish and wildlife and other related basin-wide resources. The Forum will serve as a policy discussion arena to inform the statutorily mandated and ongoing federal processes and the Northwest Power Planning Council's Fish and Wildlife Program amendment process.

States and the Northwest Power Planning Council

States also represent distinct management entities with authority over fish, wildlife and water resources within their jurisdictions. In particular, water quantity and quality issues fall under state authorities pursuant to the Clean Water Act, the Safe Water Drinking Act and state water rights laws. States have a number of management and recovery plans regarding the fish and wildlife resources of the Columbia River ecosystem.

The four states are Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana. While the states individually are participating in the Framework process and coordinating with the federal processes, they also are members of an interstate compact, the Northwest Power Planning Council. The Council was authorized under the Northwest Power Planning Act and works with a federal statutory obligation and an interstate agency staff that is something more than simply the individual four state collected together. Pursuant to the Act, the Council develops a Fish and Wildlife program that the federal action agencies take into account to the fullest extent practicable in their planning. The Council also makes recommendations to the Bonneville Power Administration about the distribution of ratepayer funds to fish and wildlife programs in the Basin.

Tribal Caucus

The thirteen Indian Tribes in the Columbia Basin represent sovereign entities with management authorities for fish, water and wildlife resources within their reservations, as well as various legal rights expressed in Treaties and Executive Orders.

To ensure coordination and effective representation in the Framework, the Forum and the Council's planning efforts, the Tribes have formed a Tribal Caucus. The Tribal Caucus serves to identify consensus views among the participating Tribes.

The 13 Columbia Basin Tribes eligible to join the Forum and Caucus include the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, the Yakama Nation, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Spokane Tribe of Indians, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, the Kalispel Tribe of Indians, the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, the Salish-Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Indian Reservation, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation, the Burns-Paiute Tribe and the Shoshone–Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Reservation.

The Federal and Tribal Caucuses and the Northwest Power Planning Council will provide mechanisms for communications between the states, tribes and Federal agencies.

Federal Caucus

Nine federal agencies are involved in various aspects of management of the Columbia River. Several of these federal agencies will be involved in the Endangered Species Act consultations on operation and configuration of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) in 1999. These federal agencies have specific statutory responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), including the preparation of a Biological Assessment and a Biological Opinion for listed species.

To prepare for these ESA consultations and to ensure coordination and effective representation in the Framework, the Forum and the Council's rulemaking, the federal agencies formed a caucus. The nine Federal agencies are the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Bonneville Power Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

Developing a Unified Multi-Species Plan for the Columbia Basin

The Framework project is developing the fundamental options and outcomes necessary to make informed management decisions. The project solicited alternative management proposals from stakeholders in the region and consolidated them into seven alternatives.

The Framework created two workgroups to analyze the alternatives for their biological, social and economic effects. Regional input and comments are being solicited on the alternatives and analysis through the summer. Federal, state, Tribal and Council representatives are participating in outreach activities together. Members of the Forum

will also discuss these alternatives. A draft report will be available for public review in September.

At the same time, the Corps of Engineers is conducting a feasibility study on alternative actions for the lower Snake River dams. The Corps' Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) examines a number of alternatives that are somewhat different from those being considered in the Framework because the Corps' process examines just hydropower actions on the Snake River.

The National Marine Fisheries Service recently completed an analysis of ecological effects likely to result from the alternatives, relying on the PATH process. The Corps intends to release a draft of the EIS for public comment this fall. NMFS' ecological effects analysis is available now.

Many in the region are optimistic that the Framework and the Forum will identify areas of consensus within the region to guide Columbia Basin fish and wildlife restoration. However, implementation of any regional plan requires more detail than either the Framework or the Forum can provide.

Accordingly, federal, state and tribal implementation plans can be expected in the future. For example, federal agencies with specific responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act, Indian treaties, and other authorities need to produce a detailed management plan for the federal hydropower system well before the end of 1999.

For this reason, the federal agencies are developing a detailed proposal for operation and configuration of the FCRPS, which they will put forward in the fall. As another example, the Council will need to amend its Fish and Wildlife Program to meet its obligation to protect, mitigate and enhance all fish and wildlife affected by the development of the hydropower system. For this reason, the Council expects to begin a Program amendment process sometime in late 1999. It is critical that all parties use the Framework process, the Forum and other coordination efforts to move the federal decisions and the Council decisions in the same directions using a common analytical basis.

A plan for managing the federal hydropower system only makes sense in the context of all the human activities that affect fish and wildlife. This is why the federal agencies are developing a "4-H Paper" that explains how the proposed hydropower management plan fits into an overall recovery strategy. The Council will be doing the same in the context of its Fish and Wildlife Program amendment process. The federal agencies and the Council intend to work within the Framework to develop alternatives that can be incorporated into the 4-H paper and the Council's amendment process.

In addition, harvest and hatchery regimes for many Columbia River fisheries are being discussed in negotiations about a new Columbia River Fish Management Plan within the U.S. v. Oregon process. Fish habitat on Forest Service and BLM lands within the Columbia River Basin are currently managed according to land management policies known as "PACFISH" and "INFISH." Decisions on the long-term management of

habitat on certain federal lands will be made through the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP) environmental impact statement and record of decision. Any agreement that comes out of these processes will form the harvest, hatchery and federal lands habitat pieces of the 4-H Paper.

Federal Products:

Public comment and drafts will culminate in: Report of the Framework project; Final Snake River EIS (Corps); Final Four-H Paper (federal agencies); Final Biological Assessment on the FCRPS (Corps, Bureau, BPA); and a Biological Opinion by the National Marine Fisheries Service and Fish and Wildlife Service for the FCRPS and the opening of the Council's amendment process.

Federal/Framework Schedule:

Public Involvement co-sponsored by Framework/Federal Agencies	Summer
Refine Framework Alternatives and Analysis	Summer
Report on Framework alternatives	Fall
Draft Four-H Paper	Fall
Draft Biological Assessment (Corps, Bureau, and BPA)	Fall
Draft Snake River EIS (Corps)	Fall
Opening of Council's Amendment Process	Fall
Public Involvement	
Final Four-H Paper	Winter
Final Biological Assessment	Winter
Final Snake River EIS	Winter
Final Biological Opinion on hydropower	Spring